

VZCZCXYZ0005
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHB0 #0768/01 0651438
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 061438Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7552
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8717
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1791
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 7121
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 3186
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 7851
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 000768

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2019
TAGS: PGOV PREL PREF PTER PHUM CO
SUBJECT: "NO CHANCE" OF FARC PEACE TALKS AS PEACE
COMMISSIONER RESTREPO RESIGNS

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo announced on February 28 that he will resign from office, effective in mid-March, to start a unified "Uribista" political movement. He said President Uribe does not expect peace talks to occur during the remainder of his term, and the President will not name a new Peace Commissioner. Instead, Restrepo will be available on an "ad honorem" basis to work peace issues as needed. He said the GOC has seen no flexibility from the FARC, and plans to take a tough line with the group. The GOC rescinded messenger Henry Acosta's authorization to contact the FARC. The GOC expects the FARC to use additional unilateral hostages releases through Senator Cordoba--and efforts to recruit international participants for the releases--to try to influence the agenda of the 2010 presidential elections. Cordoba reportedly hopes to involve Congressmen James McGovern in a hostage release. End Summary.

PEACE COMMISSIONER RESIGNS

¶2. (U) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo announced in a series of media interviews February 28 that he would resign from his position in mid-March to start a political movement aimed at creating a unified Uribista political movement and to push for President Alvaro Uribe's reelection (see septel for his political plans). Restrepo previewed his departure to us privately on February 27, and said that Uribe will not name a new Peace Commissioner. Restrepo will remain available "ad honorem" to work on either additional unilateral FARC hostage releases or peace talks with the FARC or ELN in the highly unlikely event that they occur. He will pass his remaining demobilization and Justice and Peace Law projects to High Commissioner for Reintegration Frank Pearl, while Presidential Secretary Bernardo Moreno will inherit his development projects in southern Tolima, Meta, and Sucre.

NO PEACE TALKS UNDER URIBE

¶3. (C) Restrepo told us his departure reflects President Uribe's view that there will be no peace talks with the FARC or the ELN during the remainder of his term. The FARC "rejected" the GOC's outreach efforts, and instead opted to make "political noise" using Senator Piedad Cordoba and unilateral hostage releases--all while still kidnapping. He

noted that in January, FARC Secretariat member Pablo Catatumbo sent a letter to GOC authorized messenger Henry Acosta complaining that the GOC did not understand the FARC's gestures and concluding that a FARC-GOC dialogue was impossible.

¶ 14. (C) Restrepo said the GOC's only option is to take a tough line with the FARC. The GOC would refuse to consider a humanitarian accord, since the group's price was GOC recognition of the FARC's "belligerent status." He reiterated that the GOC would condition peace talks with the FARC on the group's release of all hostages and a commitment to nonviolence--both non-starters for the FARC. Restrepo said the GOC has revoked Acosta's authorization to communicate with the group.

FARC MAY RELEASE MORE HOSTAGES

¶ 15. (C) Restrepo conceded that the FARC scored a propaganda victory at the GOC's expense through its release of six hostages to Senator Cordoba, a cost made worse by the GOC's over-flights during the first of three releases and Uribe's flip flop on whether Cordoba could participate in later releases. Restrepo said Cordoba may be able to win the Liberal Party presidential primary as a result, and a new Gallup poll showed Cordoba in the lead with 30% of Party support. Restrepo told us he plans to be much more aggressive in criticizing Cordoba and other peace talks advocates as friends of the FARC once he is out of office. Restrepo has not spoken with Cordoba since the last hostage release.

6 (C) The "Colombians for Peace" group, led by Cordoba, recently sent another letter to the FARC asking it to spell out its conditions for a humanitarian accord. Restrepo speculated that the FARC would likely release more hostages to Cordoba, creating a difficult situation for Uribe. The President has a visceral negative reaction to these FARC-controlled events and to Cordoba's facilitation, making his response to them somewhat unpredictable. Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, Armed Forces Commander Freddy Padilla and other sectors of Uribismo also detest the Cordoba-orchestrated releases.

¶ 17. (C) Restrepo said the GOC fears that Cordoba will try to involve U.S. or international actors in future releases in an attempt to complicate Colombia's international relations. He accepted the participation of journalists Jorge Enrique Botero and Daniel Pizarro Samper in the February 1 hostage release--a move which aroused Uribe's subsequent anger--to deflect possible international participation. Restrepo said it is important to convince the international community not to play a role in these FARC propaganda events. Cordoba reportedly reached out to Congressman James McGovern during her visit to Washington the week of March 2 to discuss his possible participation in another FARC hostage release.

GOC HOPES TO USE GALAN TO PRESSURE ELN AND FARC

¶ 18. (C) Restrepo lamented that the ELN also continues to play games. He said that former ELN Central Command (COCE) member Pacho Galan, convinced that armed struggle has no future in Latin America, is determined to publicly press the group to renounce violence. Galan, whose efforts are financed by the Swedes and Medellin city government, thinks the traditional peace talk model with the FARC and ELN have served only to prolong the war. Restrepo said the GOC hopes to exploit Galan's comments to put pressure on both the ELN and the FARC.

BROWNFIELD